

AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH GEORGE CHRISTIAN AND
JAMES WEBB, DIRECTOR, NASA

12:48 P.M. EDT

SEPTEMBER 16, 1968

MONDAY

MR. CHRISTIAN: Mr. Webb has been visiting with the President this morning and has one news item to give you and possibly a brief report.

MR. WEBB: Gentlemen, the President asked me when I got back from the full week examination of our international programs in Europe and attendance at the United Nations meeting on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space in Vienna, to give him a report and later asked me to give him a rundown on where we stood in the program.

I have done that. I reminded him that more than a year ago I had told him that I would be 62 on the seventh day of October and would have had, at that time, spent more than 25 years in the full-time service in the government out of the last 40 and that I thought we should consider stabilizing the future of the agency and prepare for my retirement.

We have done that. Dr. Thomas Paine was selected by the President six months ago to be Deputy Administrator. We have added to Dr. Paine two other executives of great capability, Mr. Whittaker, who came in to head up our industry affairs, who was former head of the Federal Systems Division of IBM; Mr. Beggs, who was formerly in charge of the service laboratory and then procurement for Westinghouse.

So we have three experienced executives in the age bracket from 40 to 47 and the President and I are highly pleased with their capability.

He has asked me to remain on as a consultant to Dr. Paine and the agency certainly until the 20th of January and ~~I have agreed to~~ put my time on that and any other matters that the President wishes to ask me to do.

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*planned 6 Saturn V's
6 Saturn IB's per year*

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So I think to make this very short, he has given me permission to retire on the seventh of October after more than a year of preparation for this event.

I would like to say for myself I would not retire if he felt uneasy about it, but we both feel completely confident that we have the strongest team in NASA we have ever had.

Q Mr. Webb, what will you do afterwards?

MR. WEBB: You will remember I partially retired twice before. But I certainly don't intend to take any full-time job. I have a number of quite important interests in the field of education and foreign affairs.

As you may know, I have been quite active in the Washington International Center, the Merridan House Foundation, which receives all the foreign sponsored visitors received in this country. I have done a number of things like this and will continue much of that.

You may remember that I was Chairman of the Municipal Manpower Commission at the time I took this job. I expect to examine again, after some rest, what the areas of modern technology that we have developed in the space program can do to solve some of the problems we have in the urban area.

I have a strong feeling that in the space program we have developed a combination of work that involves the economic, social and political institutions required to join together for success.. That experience can be useful in some of the problems that relate to our urban civilization.

So, I am going to put some time in. I don't expect to take any paying job.

Q How long were you in NASA?

MR. WEBB: It will be eight years on Valentine's Day, the 14th of February of next year. So it is just four months short of 8 years.

Q Mr. Webb, is Dr. Paine going to be your successor?

MR. WEBB: Yes, the President asked me to tell him and I have just telephoned him from here to tell him that the President would name him as the Acting Administrator.

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Q In terms of missions, how do you think you leave NASA?

MR. WEBB: I leave NASA well prepared and with a conservative financial structure to carry out the missions that have been approved. They will go forward. What we have not been able to do under the pressures on the budget has been to fund new missions for the 1970's. So, there is going to be a period when there will be fewer flights than would in my view have been important to do.

I could say it to you in a very simple way: We planned with the President's leadership in 1961 and his recommendations to President Kennedy to develop an ability to fly six Saturn V's per year and 6 Saturn I's per year.

As we went forward, we expected this launch rate to force the preparation of payloads that would give us a larger amount of experience and permit us then to decide what to do.

Under the reductions in the budget beginning in 1964 when the \$600 million reduction was made in one year, we have reduced that anticipated flight schedule, or production schedule, to first four per year of each and then two per year of each. We have now cancelled the production lines on both of these boosters.

So, in effect, what we will have to do is develop a new base of technology for the next generation of boosters. That is number one.

The second thing we will have boosters in storage, since we are not going to fly them and we will be developing payloads for those boosters, but instead of a driving launch schedule that would launch one Saturn a month, you will have a careful examination of what you want to take a big booster out of storage for and fly it.

In other words, they will be there and can be taken out and flown, but the country will have to look with great care into what it is it wants to do with those boosters that will be in storage.

Q Are you satisfied with the program as it stands now? Do you think it is going to meet its Apollo deadline and so forth?

MR. WEBB: I am not satisfied with the program. I am not satisfied that we as a nation have not been able to go forward to achieve a first position in space.

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What this really means is we are going to be in a second position for some time to come. So, I am certainly not satisfied with that. I am satisfied with what we have developed in every field and that we have been flying three successful generations of spacecraft.

We are headed now for the fourth. On the lunar side, we have had unmanned, Ranger, Surveyor, and the Lunar Orbiter. It is a remarkable thing to go through three generations in the first ten years of a program.

In the manned program, we have gone from Mercury to Gemini to Apollo.

I think now the question is what will the fourth generation of spacecraft be. We have a vast amount of capability.

As the USSR proceeds to fly and remains in the number one position, we will have the capability to start new programs as the need is clearly indicated. So we do have the capability. We have worked up to a work force of 420,000 people. At the end of this fiscal year, we will be down to just over 200,000. So we have shown the administrative capability to build up and then to reduce without losing pace in the program.

Q · What is the budget?

MR. WEBB: The expenditures will be slightly over \$4 billion for this current fiscal year. The new obligational authority which starts the things for the 1970's will be about \$3.35 billion. So we are spending out the money appropriated in the previous years and not replenishing the pipelines.

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Q Is Dr. Paine the Deputy now?

MR. WEBB: Yes.

Q How do you spell his name?

MR. WEBB: P a i n e just like the famous writer.

Q What about the target for the man on the Moon by 1970? Are you going to get that?

MR. WEBB: I think this will be clear in several months. We have decided to shift from the small Saturn to the big Saturn after this next flight provided the flight is successful. That flight will be in October.

We have decided to put men on the third flight of the big Saturn. That third flight will come in December.

After that, we will have one more major test which will include all the equipment including the Lunar landing module which will come in, say, late February or sometime in March.

If all of those flights go well, we will proceed to fly off rapidly four or five Saturn V flights. On any one of them, we will have the full equipment to go to the Moon, land and come back. But whether or not we will have had enough experience to feel confident in it is the question and I have a hard time answering that.

I will answer it one other way. We did calculate that we needed 15 Saturn V's in the program to make sure that we would do the Lunar landing.

We have funded eight at the moment. We expected as of last January when the President sent up his budget to fly all eight of them before 1970. Now we can only fly seven. So the real question is can we make the landing by number seven?

The next three or four months are going to tell how well this equipment goes. I think that will give you an indication.

Q What has taken the urgency, if I may put it that way, out of the U. S. space program? Is it the need to spend money elsewhere -- Vietnam, the ghettos?

MR. WEBB: I think this is right. I think also there have been always needs. I think a good many people have tended to use the space program as a sort of whipping boy, if you want to call it that. People in all kinds of areas of research would say, "If I just had some of that money the space program has," and this in a sense has produced a slightly different atmosphere than we had after Sputnik and Gagarin's flight. But in essence if it were not for the fiscal problems faced by the President and the Director of the Budget I would believe that the program would have been supported in the Congress and in the country

at a higher level than it has been. I don't think the base of support has been seriously eroded.

I think this is indicated by the fact that even with all the troubles that we have had on budget matters Congress still supported this expenditure of over \$4 billion this year.

Q Was there any point where you thought you had reached parity with the Russians?

MR. WEBB: I thought we had reached parity with the Russians about two or two and one-half years ago in every field except the flight of the large boosters and large spacecraft. They have been ahead of us in this field all the time and I have said so in every presentation of the budget to the Congress and for the last four years I have stated that while we have developed options, each of those four budgets would not close that gap with the big spacecraft.

What I pointed out was that they had been flying 10,000 and 15,000-pound spacecraft and recovering them at will. The Gemini is only 7,000 pounds. We have had two flights with the Apollo on the Saturn V. But we were just coming into that area of matching them with these flights.

So we have not been ahead of them or equal to them in the big boosters and the big spacecraft at any time. The 12 Saturns a year would have brought us there I think without any doubt. If we could have done that in late '67 or early '68, I think we would have forged ahead. But they are still moving at the rate that they have built up to, in fact, increasing it.,

So while we are reducing down to a half to two-thirds of our previous program, they are still increasing.

Q Mr. Webb, does the President naming Dr. Paine as Acting Administrator indicate that he does not intend to nominate a new Administrator?

MR. WEBB: You had better ask the President that. He has told me to tell Dr. Paine he was going to name him Acting Administrator on the 7th of October. I think I can only say that he has expressed the strongest confidence in Dr. Paine.

Dr. Paine is one of the outstanding men in this country, both in science, in technology, engineering and in management. He has had 19 years in GE before he came to us managing important activities. He was a submarine man and worked up to be executive officer of a submarine during World War II. He is qualified to run the job without a doubt.

I don't want to speak for the President.

Q What was his last position with GE?

MR. WEBB: He was the Executive Officer of an organization called TEMPO which is a technology development

unit on the West Coast -- Santa Barbara, California. Before that he had run one of their large laboratories at Schenectady and Lynn, Massachusetts.

So he has had 19 years. They had selected him to move up in the higher echelons and be in the corporate offices that would be responsible for all the affairs of GE. He chose to come into the Government to widen out his horizons and broaden. So it was his choice. GE, I am sure, did not want him to leave.

Q You say it was about six months ago that he was made Deputy Administrator?

MR. WEBB: Yes.

Q How old is he?

MR. WEBB: He was 46 when he was appointed.

Q Mr. Webb, you say we were approaching parity about 2-1/2 years ago with the exception of the big boosters and payloads. Where do we stand now with your departure?

MR. WEBB: We are not conducting the program at a level that will bring parity.

Q Have we fallen dangerously behind their progress?

MR. WEBB: I am not going to use an (adjective) like that. What I said is that under the President's leadership facing all the problems we have funded the flights in a conservative way that were required to meet our commitments, the flights we have committed ourselves to, and that this will give us experience, Saturn V and Apollo experience, out to the Moon. It will give us up to 6,000 hours of flight experience.

This gives a capability to do what we have to do in the future. Any danger to the United States that would come from the Russian program would be visible in time to use this capability to start out. But they are going to have the reality and the image of being out in front for a number of years to come. How dangerous that is you will have to judge yourself.

Q You seem to be saying they have topped the Saturn V which they haven't?

MR. WEBB: I have been testifying for three years in the Congress that they were building a booster bigger than the Saturn V and they will be flying it soon. *mr by 1 Sep 71*

Q I would like to clarify one point. Your decision is entirely on the grounds of length of service. It doesn't reflect any dissatisfaction with the Administration?

MR. WEBB: None whatever. The President and I discussed this more than a year ago. We examined the factors

of it in writing and the effort we have made is to create an agency that could operate without me.

I am very anxious that come January 20 and then July 1, 1969, which is the beginning of a fiscal year, the agency will be in the strongest possible position.

I believe and the President will have to speak for himself that to go through a period of operation with my being available for advice but not making the decisions will leave them in the strongest possible position for January 20.

Then they will have to go through what the new President does with President Johnson's budget on space and then you will enter the fiscal year.

So everything he and I have looked at has been how to leave the agency in the strongest position to do its work in a non-political way.

THE PRESS: Thank you.

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(AT 1:05 P.M. EDT)